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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

14 April 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Short-Term Communist Intentions in Laos

1. Soviet actions suggest considerable confidence that the Communists have a good thing going in Laos, and that there is no compelling need for them -- at the moment -- to let the US off the hook. Moscow almost certainly considers that US recognition of the RLG's crumbling capability and will to resist has caused Washington to seek to negotiate its way out of a most difficult situation in Laos, and to do so quickly while there are still some non-Communist positions of strength remaining in Laos. The Soviets almost certainly wish to avoid an expansion of hostilities, but probably are not convinced that the US is prepared to take extreme military measures in the immediate future. Consequently, we believe that while Moscow is prepared to negotiate a Laos settlement, it presently believes it can do so at its own pace and on its own terms.

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2. It is possible that at present the USSR has no intention of seriously negotiating, confident that the situation in Laos is so soft that a new military push by the PL might cause the FAL either to fold up or frantically to pull its forces southward, delivering Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Paksane over to PL control. The USSR may consider that it can string the US along for some time with an unhurried "readiness" to negotiate, in the belief that the situation in Laos will meanwhile so deteriorate that the US and SEATO will either not intervene at all, or will do so too late to salvage much.

3. We believe it more likely, however, the Soviet leaders genuinely fear that if pushed too far or put off too long, the US will in fact intervene on a major scale. We further believe that the USSR will not abandon the fairly cautious course it has pursued in Laos thus far, fearing the risks that major US intervention in Laos might in turn lead to expanded hostilities. Soviet delay thus far in negotiating seriously is probably largely due to expectations that, up to a point, as time goes on the US will be more pliant in accepting probable Communist terms: i.e., no firm cease-fire or verification thereof, a Souvanna Phouma government, NLHX representation in that government, loosely drawn safeguards against

continued Communist subversion and supply of arms, and continued firm Communist military and political control over the areas of northern Laos now held by PL forces. In this connection, we believe that the Communists will not again give up control of PL-held areas, as they did in the Vientiane agreements of 1956 when, in effect, they gave up de facto control of two provinces and much of their organized military force in exchange for cabinet representation and the right to compete with the non-Communist political forces in the parliamentary and political context.

4. Thus we believe that the USSR will seek to delay negotiations for some time longer, possibly for some weeks, confident that the RLG position is progressively deteriorating and may collapse at any time. Should serious negotiations ensue, we anticipate one difficulty after another during the conference, the Soviets attempting to gain everything possible short of precipitating open US intervention. To this end, they would probably permit the continuance of some limited PL activity, in an effort to weaken further the US negotiating position.

5. Although there have been some Sino-Soviet differences of tone and approach concerning Laos, we believe that Communist

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China and the USSR are in general accord on policy there thus far. The Communist course appears clearly to be set and guided primarily by Moscow, with the DRV the chief executive agent, and China an additional source of logistic and moral support.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



for SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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